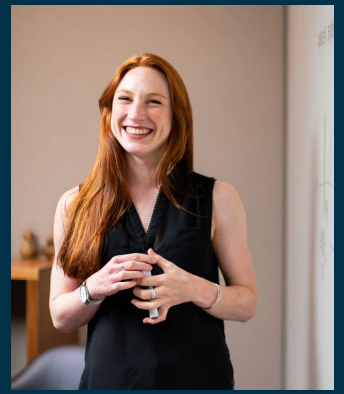




CHECKLIST: 7 Ways to Engage People Right Away

By John Millen



You never get a second chance to make a first impression.

Living in a digital world as we do, with our micro attention spans, people are deciding within seconds whether it's worth listening to us. You've got to open strong. Scientific research confirms that we have between three and seven seconds to engage people before they move on to other distractions, such as their phones.

With this in mind, it's clear that the beginning of any communication is the most important time to connect. There are many ways for you to start your talk. But here are seven winners you can use to start any presentation, meeting or conversation.

1. Ask engaging questions

In a presentation, instead of asking “how are you doing?” you might ask “How many of you feel overwhelmed by all the changes we’re implementing this year?” and then say, “me too!” Ask open-ended questions like these, instead of closed-end questions that can be answered Yes or No.

2. Share stunning statistics

Use a couple of key numbers in the beginning to gain interest and set up your premise. Warning: don't overwhelm people with too many numbers. Just a pinch to spice up your dish — don't dump it all in there because if you do, you'll have the opposite effect: a turn-off.

3. Tell a relevant story

Tell a story or short anecdote right off the bat. Immediately. People love that, as long as it's relevant and you tie it in. You have plenty of good stories to tell. It might feel weird starting off with a story, but trust me, it works. We humans are hardwired for stories.

4. Create a meaningful analogy

What situation do you find your business in? What is the major challenge you're trying to motivate people to overcome? An analogy, or metaphor, can give people the change of perspective they need to move forward.

Like this: As we near the end of the year, we are so close to winning in the national sales competition. We are like mountain climbers have been beaten down with injuries and challenges throughout the year, but we're still here and we're about to reach the summit. Let's meet our biggest challenge and win it all.



5. Make a request

I always recommend a call to action at the end of your presentation or meeting. People want to know what to do with the information you've given them. What does it mean to them and what should they do with it? Lacking a call to action can make it largely irrelevant.

An interesting and engaging technique is to ask people for action up front. Make your request or call to action at the beginning. This way they'll know exactly what you're asking them to do and the reasons why.

6. Give a powerful quote

The right quote, relevant and from a credible source, can set the tone for everything. In most of my coaching and training sessions, you'll at some point hear my favorite communication quote, which comes from Maya Angelou:

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." Truth.

7. Tell an appropriate joke

Warning: this is the riskiest tactic of all. If you're not naturally funny, don't tell a joke. If you are naturally funny, don't automatically decide to tell a joke. You need to decide if the audience is ready, the environment is right and the joke is relevant. Lacking any of these elements can hurt you. And having all of these elements aligned is no guarantee of success.

It doesn't have to be your own joke. When speaking on dealing with anxiety, I often tell Seinfeld's joke: "According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy."

Which is also truth. We all have anxiety in communicating with others, but once you engage your audience, with a strong opening, you'll feel a sense of connection that will give you the energy to keep engaging them all the way to the end.

Open strong, my friend.



John Millen

John is leadership communication expert, educator and keynote speaker. Over the past 18 years, he's helped more than 7,000 leaders grow their businesses and careers with communication and storytelling skills.

